

The May family and the Four brothers in WWI

John May was Private, #1233 in 35th Brigade, which became 1st Battalion in Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry Regiment in 1881. Many of British forces were amalgamated into Battalions and they each spent time serving on 'home' tour and abroad. He enlisting in Bodmin on 14 July 1879 at 18 years of age as a single Carpenter born in Kenwyn, parents John May, Sawyer & Mariner (#522022, Served at sea in 1851) & Elizabeth Bonds Pascoe. He was 5ft 5in tall, fresh complexion, had blue eyes and light brown hair. By Oct 1880 he was in Jersey in the Channel Islands and six weeks later Aldershot Army Base in Hampshire. By Jan 1881 he was serving in Gibraltar for 18 months, then Egypt for 3 months. He returned home to England Nov 1882 and received the Egyptian Medal in 1882, a Clasp for Tel-el-Kebir, Khedive's Bronze Star and Third Class with two Good Conduct Badges for his service. After over two years service later, he was admitted to Devonport hospital in April 1883. He served in Ireland thereafter and was admitted to Cork hospital in the end of 1883 and Dublin over one year later. At this time in Ireland, William Gladstone made a second attempt at his 'Home Rule Bill' for Ireland, apparently allowing the Irish to have more say in how they were governed.

Around 1884 the Regiments soldiers were trained in Bodmin where a Regimental Museum still exists. They hold photographs of all recruits of the time, but sadly they aren't named. 1st Battalion around this time were heavily involved in affairs in India, and in 1885 they were moved to Malta, and in 1888 to Belary and Madras. John was transferred to 1st Class Army Reserves on 4 Sept 1885 when he was 24yrs old. He was a Carpenter with the intended place of residence being with parents at Daniel Street, Daniel Square, Truro. This and his 1st Marriage to Hannah Coombes on 13 May 1888 in St Gluvias, Cornwall (both of Penryn) may have made him exempt from fighting in India. The 1st Battalion were moved to Mandalay from 1890-91 to quell the rebellion in Burma, which became known as the 'Wunthoo' Expedition. Upon final discharge on 4 Jul 1891 at the age of 30 when he was a Carpenter staying at Morely Hotel, East St, Plymouth. In 1901 Census John was still living in Treluswell, St Gluvias, Barras Moor, Perranworthal, Truro with William J (16) & Elizabeth (13), however without his wife who died in Mar 1891. John emigrated on the 'Rimutaka' to New Zealand with nephew Hugh Roberts, leaving London 22 Feb & arriving into Wellington on 11 Apr 1906. John May Died 16 Jun 1908 at 33 Coleridge St, Sydenham, Chch and is Buried 18 Jun 1908 at Sydenham Cemetery, Christchurch, Block 18C, Plot 61 in an unmarked grave.

John May Seniors sons and 'brothers in arms' William, Arthur, Harry, John May & Percy Morse enlisted for WWI, perhaps following in the footsteps of their fathers' long period of service.



*Egypt Medal with
Tel-el-Kebir Clasp*



Khedive's Star





John May, #ANF1114
Rank: Able Seaman,
Arm of service: Royal Navy

Mobilized from Auckland for Savoy on the HMS Pyramus on 4 Aug 1914 and Discharged 7 Apr 1919. Total service of 4 years, 178 days.

Place where service performed:
New Zealand, Pacific, East Indies Station,
German East Africa, Persian Gulf & Aegean
(see following map).

John later resident at 92 Cobham Street, Spreydon, Christchurch near where he met his first wife Alberta Margaret Ashby (Daisy), who's parents living only doors down. They married on 10 Oct 1916 at St Mary's Church, Addington, Chch.

According to Auckland Weekly News on 21 September 1916 the HMS Pyramus was scheduled to arrive in port of Wellington on the 28th of September with brothers Harry & John May, Able Seaman aboard. Also noted in the Ashburton Guardian, on 20 January 1916, are letters from someone aboard the HMS Pyramus about their 'Adventurous Cruise' & 'Work in the Persian Gulf'. They were part of the Battle of the Rufiji River, which rendered the German cruiser Konigsberg out of action. They engaged thereafter plenty of action in the Persian Gulf and were stationed in the North mouth of the Rufiji River, in Tanzania with the Konigsberg in tow. When they came under fire from the shores the crew of the Konigsberg abandoned ship and risked their chances on land amidst mines and torpedoes. They took a break in Zanzibar, then left East Africa in late July for Aden, Yemen and for Muscat, Oman not long after where they stocked up on supplies. They ventured to Bushire, Iran on August 8th to join forces with Indian troops and deal with Ras Ali of Dilwar, Tangestan, which was 20 miles south. They crossed the Gulf of Bahrein, the great Pearl Island and proceeded to settle a quarrel in Ali Bida, an old forgotten Turkish fort. A local persuaded the Turkish garrison to abandon the fort or the Pyramus would attack. By the time they landed it was abandoned and locals were emptying the contents. Temperatures in this area were up to and around 114 degrees farenheit or 45.6 celsius. Much time was spent bombarding the Tangestanis and protecting Bushire from German capture. A battle ensued at Ras Ali with Indian forces (led by British officers who were killed) once again and many were hit by shell fire. They sailed from the upper end of the gulf about mid September protecting the coastal telegraph stations.

The log books for the Pyramus are thorough and record daily incidences. For instance in the service of John there was 1314 days and therefor the same amount of pages in the log books. They can be found transcribed and the originals can be downloaded at:
http://www.naval-history.net/OWShips-WW1-05-HMS_Pyramus.htm



HMS Pyramus Voyages 1914-19



HMS Pyramus at Williamstown, Melbourne in 1914



THE OFFICERS OF THE "PYRAMUS."
Commander J. M. de Robeck and Some of His Shipmates.

Harry May, Able Seaman in Australasian Royal Naval Force and served for almost 5 years on HMS Pyramus & Doris from 4 Aug 1914 to 7 Apr 1919 with Auckland, NF Regiment No 1660. He served in East Africa & East Indies stations. Harry was a Cabinet Maker in Nov 1919 living with his brother Arthur May at 6 Macauley St, Addington. He eventually married Ada Priscilla Boys in 1923.

According to article in the Timaru Herald, Volume CVIII, Issue 1679, 10 February 1919:
"Wellington, Feb 8. The Port Hacking was berthed at 7:30 this morning and landed some 34 Naval ratings, who have been on active service in the Persian Gulf and eastern seas, Most of the men were on active service on the Pyramus and Philomel, and came back to New Zealand some three years ago, but subsequently were redrafted to HMS Doris."

Also the article in New Zealand Herald, Volume LV, Issue 17036, 18 December 1918, Page 8:
"Crew of HMS Doris, New Zealanders to Return. Wellington, Tuesday. The naval adviser reports that 48 New Zealanders, who originally formed part of the crew of the Pyramus, and were transferred to HMS Doris in March 1917, will shortly be paid off at Bombay, and will return to New Zealand."

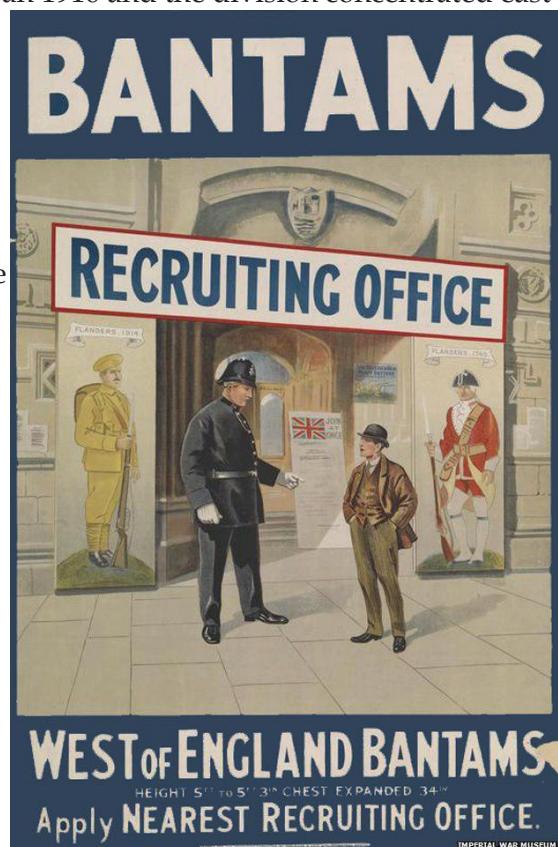
If this is when Harry would have left the Pyramus, in March 1917, then perhaps we can determine his whereabouts during and after this year. In March 1917 the Doris was sent from the Mediterranean to the East Indies station and by the end of March, the Doris was active between Fremantle, Western Australia and Mauritius Island off East Africa & Madagascar. At some stage the Doris must have landed in New Zealand, and by November, during a hunt for more German raiders, they were landed in Aden, Yemen.



HMS Doris in WWI

William John May Born 10 Dec 1884 in Truro. He married Margaret Jane Totton on 5 Aug 1905 in Greenwich Registrar Office, London. William was a Farm Labourer during the 1911 Census living with wife & daughter, both named Margaret, in Higher Penweathers, Truro. They had 4 Children of which only two were living on 16 Mar 1916 however one of them, his son William, died age 20. The last survivor Margaret Florence May it appears married Thomas Richards and they moved to St Austell and had three children. William enlisted in Jul 1915 at age 30 for Service in WWI as a Farm Labourer & resident of Kea Downs, Chacewater. Private #M21786, Regiment #T306284, a Rank Driver, Embarked with the 14th Expeditionary Force for France on 30 Jan 1916 as a Driver. He was Demobilized 10 Mar 1919 and received the British Victory Medal along with a British War Medal. In 1939 Register William was working as a Jobbing Gardener living with wife Margaret at Killow View, Chyreen Lane, Kea. William Died Mar Qtr 1959 in Truro, age 74.

14th Bantam Battalion (West England), was for physically fit men under 5'3". In June 1915 they came under command of 105th Brigade in 35th Division with Gloucester Regiment, at Masham. They were adopted by War Office 23 Jun 1915 and moved to Salisbury Plain Aug 1915. Landed in the English base on the French coastline, Le Havre on 30 Jan 1916 and the division concentrated east of St Omer. During 1916 they were engaged in the Battle of Bazentin Ridge, the fighting for Arrow Head Copse & Maltz Horn Farm, and the fighting for Falfemont Farm. During June 1916 they raided a German trench, and it became a hand-to-hand fight. At the end, 30 Germans and eight British lay dead, and the British had captured a Maxim heavy machine gun. In 1917 they were part of the pursuit of the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, the fighting in Houthulst Forest, and the Second Battle of Passchendaele. In the final year of WWI they saw action in the First Battle of Bapaume, the Battle of Ypres, the Battle of Courtrai, the action of Tieghem. Finally on 11 Feb 1918 the 14th disbanded in France. 12 Officers, 250 men were transferred to the 13th Battalion. Near Aumale, 11 Nov 1918 marked their end of the war in France. See War Diary for 14th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment, Jan 1916 - Feb 1918 at UK National Archives, Reference: WO 95/2488/1 (downloadable).



WWI Victory Medal



WWI British War Medal

Arthur May, Born 19 Jul 1893 in Plymouth, England. Height 5ft 6in, Light Brown Hair & Fair Complexion with brown eyes. Served as Trooper & Sgt #13/756 (Feb 1915 – Oct 1919), #3/16/361 (Aug 1940 - Jan 1942) and #566834 (Jan 1942 - Dec 1943). During WWI served with 1st Squadron, Canterbury Mounted Rifles, 3rd Reinforcements, New Zealand Expeditionary Force for 1 year 306 days. He enlisted at age 24, with his occupation being a Storeman for Dunlop Rubber Co., Chch and was discharged 12 Oct 1919. His Embarkation Unit was 34th Reinforcement Mounted Rifles on 14 Feb 1915 and served in Egypt until 11 Apr 1916 when he was invalided and discharged to NZ from Suez on the "Maheno" on 11 Apr 1916. He had fought in Gallipoli from May to Dec 1915 and the survivors were known as the 'Diehards'. He received Typhoid fever and was awarded a Star, Clasps, Badge, British War Medal & Victory Medal for this battle. He returned to service with 34th Mounted Rifles on 13 Nov 1917 from Wellington for Suez, Egypt on the "Tofua". Arthur then served in Egypt (E.F.) until 12 Oct 1919, returning on the 'Eilenca', completing almost 4 years of service. Father was deceased and he was previously living with mother Mrs Jessie Roberts at 6 Howard Street, Spreydon and later based at 44 Coronation Street, Spreydon, Christchurch. In 1919 both Arthur & brother Harry were living at 6 Macauley St, Addington, Chch where he was an Electrical Wireman and Harry was a Cabinet Maker.

It appears he did a stint during WWII with Unit 17 "Coy Nat R." from 14 Aug 1940 to 7 Dec 1943. In this time he travelled back to Plymouth from 10 Jan- 11 Aug 1942 where he was noted as being on 'sick' leave, most likely visiting family in Cornwall. However he was mainly based in Nelson & Burnham helping with training recruits perhaps. He was a Carpenter of Greymouth Council, living in Coal Creek, Greymouth at the time. Died in Cobden on 15 Mar 1974, wife Myrtle Victoria May living at 162 Ward St, Cobden, Greymouth. His son Arthur May Jr, served as a Corporal in Korean War, 1950-54. Previously an Electrician he enlisted in Nelson and embarked with the Kayforce, 10 Company, RNZASC. Died in a vehicle accident while on service 21 Nov 1954 at age 28. He is Buried in Yokohama War Cemetery, Japan.

Adopted brother Percy Morse, Trooper, also fought with the Canterbury Mounted Rifles, 1st Squadron, No. 7/752, had clear complexion, blue eyes, brown hair and was 5ft 8.5in. Percy signed up on 20 Oct 1914 for service when he was living with adoptive parents Hugh & Jessie Roberts at 6 Howard St, Spreydon, Chch and working for Hugh Roberts. He served for 1 year, 280 days, half in NZ, half overseas with brother Arthur in Gallipoli and he was admitted to Pout Koubba Hospital afterward on 9 July 1915 with Shell Concussion. Percy was Discharged on 26 July 1916 after extended sick leave and was invalided to NZ aboard the Willochra on 23 Sep 1915. He received a 1914-15 Star, British War Medal & Victory Medal. He was born 30 Sep 1894 in Sydenham, Chch and was a Carpenter, he died 5 Jun 1944 in Hamner Springs area (#25375) at 49 years old. He was adopted by Jessie Roberts and was brother to John, Harry, Arthur, Robert & Thomas. It appears Percy Morse was a farmer in Barcaldine, Waiau, Nth Canterbury by 1928, where he was living since 15 Jun 1920.





"The Diehards," photographed at Zeitoun immediately after the Evacuation.



*British War
Medal*



*Canterbury Yeomanry
Cavalry, 1st Squadron*



1914-15 Star



*The Victory
Medal*

John Arthur May
RNZAF #428019,
Medical Category A3B
4th Battalion- the Canterbury Regiment,
Army # 3/37/675, Military Headquarters: S.M.D.
Attested 6/2/40, Entered Camp 15/5/42

Next of kin: Mrs Alberta M. May, mother, 61 King St,
Sydenham, Chch (address at 21 Dec 1946)
Last Job: Mechanic at Barlow Bros, Durham St, Chch;
Profession: Engineer- fitting & turning, modifying
machinery, Lathe worker & Lorry driver
Height 5ft 9.5in, Fair hair, Brown Eyes & Fair Complexion

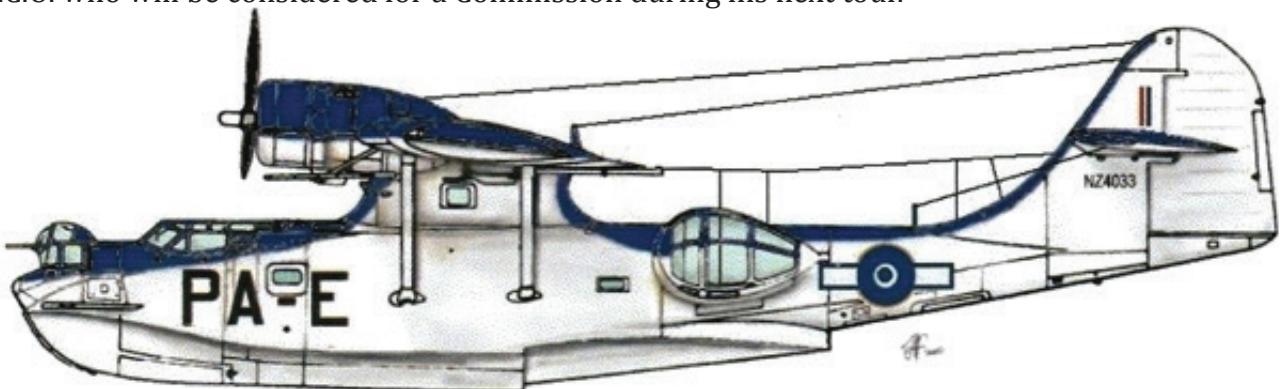
Medals received:

1939-45 Star & Pacific Star
for service in Bouganville
Defense Medal
for service in the Pacific
War Medal
for service in the Air Force
NZ War Service Medal;
Air Force - Jul '42 -Sep 1945,
Air Observers Badge
W.E.F. awarded 21 Aug 1943



John Arthur May

John Arthur May, while in training flew Anson & Oxfords, totalling 82 hours flying time. During training and service during WWII, he flew TBF in 30 Squadron, 174 hours and Catalina over 288 hours in both 5 & 6 Squadrons. With 30 Squadron he spent 2 months Training from Jan 1944 and 2 months on Tour of Duty at Bougainville March-May 1944. He was a Air Gunner, Navigator and became Flight Sergeant. Flying Plane NZ2513 with Pilot/ Squadron Leader Noel H. James & H.G. Horton, completing 27 Missions (Sorties) and 20 Strikes, most likely on enemy bases. General remarks for tour by Sq Ldr James were he was an efficient and keen sting gunner & radar operator with a morale discipline and conduct of a high standard. Noel recommended him for promotion in turn and had high hopes for his future service in South Pacific Area. John was a Warrant Officer & Navigator flying Catalinas in the Pacific. During July to Oct 1944 John was flying with 6 Squadron, and then with 5 Squadron in Segund, Espiritu Santo from Jan - May 1945 flying Catalina PA-E, NZ4033. After completing 26 Missions his commanding officer claimed he was above the average as a Navigator, very reliable and accurate in all his work. A very good type of N.C.O. who will be considered for a Commission during his next tour.



During WWII any arrivals at Unit Stations were logged whenever New Zealand personell were being transported. These record John Enlisting on 10 Jul 1942 and being at RNZAF Ohakea base, near Bulls, Manawatu and engaged as Aircrafthand at Aerodrome Defence Unit, Group 5(?). He was remustered to Air Crew Under Training on 6 Feb 1943 & reclassified as Lieutenant Air Commander. John was to undertake what was most likely his fitness training course at RNZAF [I.T.W.] Rotorua from Feb - Apr 1943. He also was in New Plymouth in an Air Observers Course from Apr-May 1943 and a General Reconnaissance Course afterward until mid July 1943. By 23 July he was back in Ohakea, and was promoted to Seargent in Air Observers on 21 Aug 1943 when he did his Navigators Armament Course from Aug-Sep 1943. The Linton Commando Course, south of Palmerston North must have been the final stage of his air crew training from Sep - Oct 1943 as he was recommended for 30 Squadron on 27 Oct 1943. John was moved from forward by the end of Jan 1944 into 30 Squadron, PRD Mangere. His promotion to Flight Seargent Observers on 21 Feb 1944 was the final stage of his pre war training. He had passed his Courses as Commando & Navigator; also Air Observers, Radar, Bombing & Gunnery Courses.

The 30 Squadron disembarked 27 May 1944 to No 1 Port Depot, Auckland and from the Base Depot Reception Pool, embarked from NZ to forward area on 30 Jul 1944. He was then serving with 6 Squadron air crew until 24 Aug 1944 when he was transported back to P.R.D. Mangere, and then moved to Air Crew Pool in Hobsonville, Auckland where he embarked for Lauthala Bay, Fiji, his third Tour of 78 days. On 17 Dec 1944 he was back in Remuera, Auckland from Fiji for Christmas leave with family. By 18 Jan 1945 he left the 30 Squadron for 5 Flying Boat Squadron. This time was marked his promotion to Warrant Officer & Navigator on 21 Feb 1945. He was back in NZ on 9 May 1945 with No 5 Squadron. Then moved to Air Crew Pool in Hobsonville, Auckland 2 Jul 1945, then with '10 SU' by the 24 July in Ohakea TS (Training Service?). John was granted privilege leave from 18-31 Aug 1945 and then discharged with Class C Reserve on 1 Sep 1945. He was officially discharged on 15 Sept 1945 and his letter of gratuity was dispatched on 16 May 1952 to 73 Cygnet St, Nth Brighton, Chch.

Bruce Douglas May, son of John Arthur May, started Air Training Corps at age 15. Entered the RNZAF Base in Woodbourne near Blenheim as a Cadet at age 17. Bruce was stationed at Te Rapa Air Force Base, Hamilton about 1976. By 1983 he was a Flight Sergeant in RNZAF and around this time he departed to serve around Singapore in the RNZAF. Perhaps following in the steps of his fathers campaign, peacekeeping in the Pacific. Sadly the New Zealand Government pulled much of its funding and defense forces were restructured at the beginning of the 1990's.



1939-45 Star



Defense Medal



NZ War Service



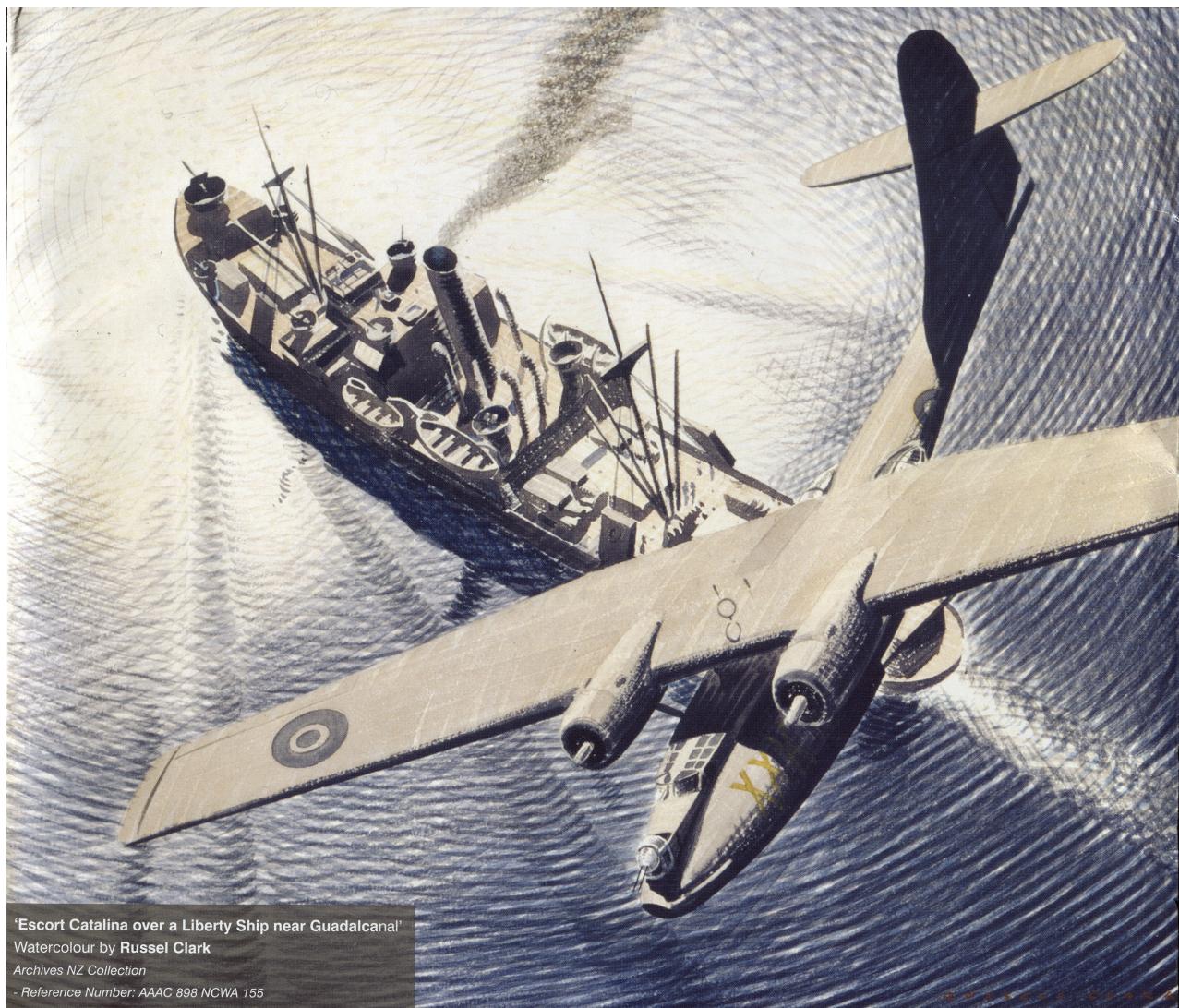
War Medal



Pacific Star



TBF Grumman Avenger; 30 Squadron; painting by Maurice Conly



'Escort Catalina over a Liberty Ship near Guadalcanal'

Watercolour by Russel Clark

Archives NZ Collection

- Reference Number: AAAC 898 NCWA 155

Important Notes and References:

See articles:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canterbury_Mounted_Rifles_Regiment
<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/canterbury-mounted-rifles>

“Sinai campaign of 1916 and the Palestine campaign of 1917–18. After the armistice with the Ottoman Turks in October 1918 the CMR was sent back to Gallipoli as part of an occupying force. In March 1919 the regiment was sent to Egypt to help suppress nationalist riots. The CMR disbanded in June, when most of its officers and men embarked on the troop transport *Ulimaroa* for the return voyage to New Zealand.”

All service records can be accessed freely through these websites:

<http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/search/>
<http://archway.archives.govt.nz/>
<http://www.nzdf.mil.nz/personnel-records/nzdf-archives/accessing-military-service-records.htm>
Research Collections at the Wigram, Christchurch Air Force Museum are open, by appointment for further possible information.

Also see books:

Official History: RNZAF by Squadron Leader J.M.S. Ross (pgs 246-51 & pgs 276-9)
Royal New Zealand Air Force by Squadron Leader J. M. S. Ross (Pgs 125-312)
Wings Over the Pacific - The RNZAF in the Pacific War by Alex Horn
(pgs 5, 47-9, 65, 74, 79, 112, 115 & 186-91)
The Avengers - Historical Record of No 30 (Bomber) Squadron & Servicing Unit RNZAF 1943-1944
by Wally Ingham (died 27 May 2015, age 93)

Perhaps also:

Jungle Bomber by Frank Holmes
A Shower of Spray And We're Away! by Fred Ladd with Ross Annabell